

## Earth-Friendly Gardening & Landscaping

# The GreenMan



## Peachy Ideas for Your Patio

There has been a Lilliputian revolution going on in the world of fruit. While most everything in our culture has been getting super-sized, horticulturists and plant geneticists have been toiling away, developing dwarf and super-dwarf varieties of fruit trees ideally suited for the smallest backyard or patio garden. You can almost smell the peaches ripening from your bedroom window!

Edible landscaping has come a long way from an earlier period when backyard gardeners seldom mixed their media: fruit and veggies went to one corner, and ornamental plants to another. Today, seed companies who used to stick to sunflower and marigold seeds now offer a dazzling variety of dwarf fruit trees. If space is an issue — no problem! They can ship you a dwarf "Fruit Cocktail" tree featuring grafts of apricot, peach, nectarine, and plum.

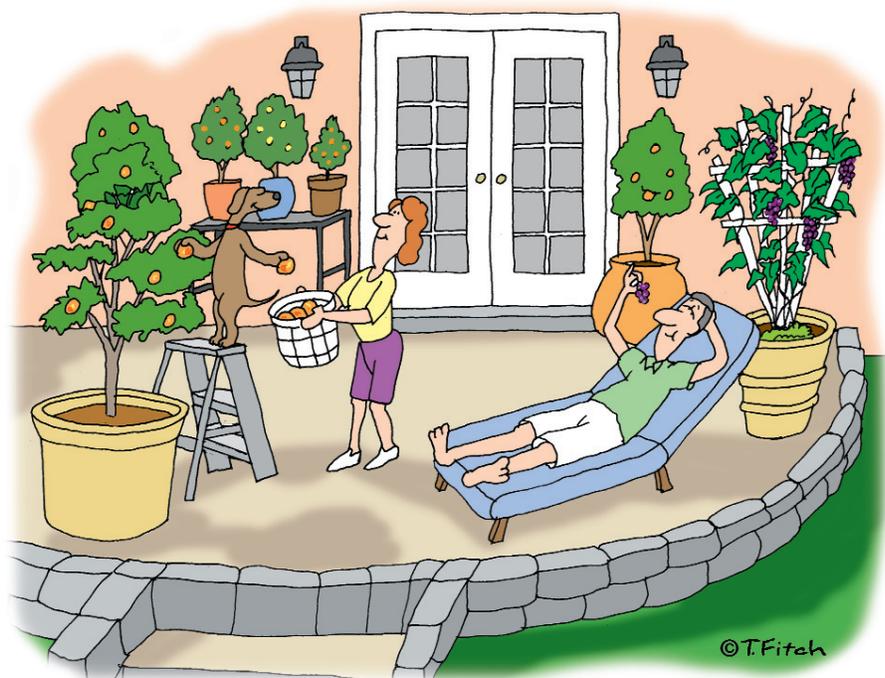
More telling are the non-garden gourmet catalogs like Harry & David, who sell "Patio Lemon Trees" along with their mango-of-the-month club. Smith & Hawken, best known for upscale gardening furnishings, recently ran two catalog pages featuring gourmet olive

trees, various dwarf citrus, even a pomegranate shrub.

Can bananas for the Beltway be far behind? Actually: no! A recent conversation with fruit-and-nut guru Mike McConkey at Edible Landscaping in Virginia found Mike very excited about his Novak Super Dwarf Banana, a mere three-to-four foot variety, which he had been growing in a 25-gallon pot. The super dwarf had started to produce banana "hands," the technical term for the bunches of fruit ("banana" itself is derived from the Arabic

word for finger). Yes, we have some bananas.

Mike did caution that to produce fruit, the plant needs a substantial container, about the size of a half-whiskey barrel. Novak can be grown in smaller pots, approximately three gallon capacity, as a wonderful ornamental and conversation piece, perhaps under-planted with 'Black Heart' sweet potato vines or colorful flowers, but don't expect it to raise a hand — or lift a finger. Remember that tropical bananas will need to be protected from



frost, which is also true of container-grown figs, especially the less hardy varieties.

My rooftop garden, by the way, has been fig-friendly for years. I successfully raised two 'Hardy Chicago' figs in ten-gallon pots on my rooftop garden for about four years, until they outgrew their containers. During that time, we harvested several colanders of fruit annually — perhaps more, but we tended to eat as we picked. And while we were perhaps lucky to have experienced mild winters during that period, I suspect that figs capable of surviving Lake Michigan winters can easily handle our less severe climate. However, consider over-wintering your container-bound fig in a dark, cool space to play it safe.

My aerial edible landscape also hosted several varieties of dessert grapes in large tubs, with vines trained along a railing. Like my figs, the vines were gifts from a friend, and eventually I handed down my pass-along plants to schools with better growing environments. For use on patios, Mike suggested the seedless Jupiter variety, a reddish-purple table grape released by breeders at the University of Arkansas in 1998. Jupiter produces large Muscat-flavored fruits, although pot or tub-grown specimens may have smaller and fewer fruit. Still, what better backdrop for an afternoon wine and cheese reception?

And then there are patio peaches. Scores of them. Dwarf peaches can be grown in five-gallon containers and offer rich green, red, or purple leaves, fragrant, pink flowers -- sometimes even showy double flowers — and a variety of free-stone fruits with yellow or orange flesh and a blush of red. Most varieties are self-fertile (you only need one), and a one-gallon plant will likely produce fruit in just one year. Best of all, these dwarfed delights will often reach only four to five feet at maturity, helping them fit in even the smallest patio space.

As life is seldom a bowl of cherries, you might want to grow your own, starting with tasty, tangy bush cherries. Among the most popular are the White or Red Nanking Cherries, which can reach six feet or slightly more. These Chinese natives are extremely cold tolerant, and while they can form a wide-spreading shrub, great for hedges or foundation plantings, the patio gardener can also prune and train the plant as a miniature tree.

The fruits of these "Manchu" cherries seem to range from somewhat sweet to tart, and are often used in jams or pies. However, aficionados of the plant are often content with the numerous small pink buds which open to a fragrant, snowy white.

Keep in mind that Nanking cherries are not self-fertile, and you'll need more than one to ensure cross-pollination. For easy-going

patio use, Mike McConkey recommended several four-foot tall, fall-fruiting specimens developed by the acclaimed New Hampshire breeder, Elwyn Meader, whose bush cherries include Jan, Joy, and Joel, with Joel being both self-fertile and the most flavorful.

More choices? In the world of dwarf and super-dwarf patio fruits there are always more options. Most of the available plants are offered through on-line or mail order sources, but they range from columnar apples, for a special taste of espalier, to the intensely fragrant, pink-ruffled blooms of apricots. And we haven't even mentioned bonsai possibilities, or dwarf nut trees, or even berries! Pretty obviously, you can afford to think big when you start thinking small.



The GreenMan Show is produced for County Cable Montgomery by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Office of Public Information. It airs daily on Cable Channel 6 and can also be

viewed on the Internet. For a complete schedule and online access, visit [www.greenmanshow.com](http://www.greenmanshow.com).

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